

## I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood, and part 9 of our series called Illusions.
- B. Everything is not as it seems.
- C. In this series we are digging into some of the differences between how we think, and how the Bible thinks.
- D. This is important, because we believe how the Bible thinks is how God thinks. It is the divine script. The Bible is mind of Christ. He created the world, he set its governing laws in place, and no one knows how everything is supposed to work as well as God.
  - 1. An illusion is something you think is true, but it isn't true.
  - 2. An illusion is something you think is beautiful, but it isn't beautiful.
    - a) Illusions fool people.
    - b) Illusions seduce people.
    - c) Illusions give false hope to people.
    - d) Illusions break your heart.
- E. Every time I go fishing, I present an illusion to a largemouth bass. By the time the fish realizes what's going on, it's too late.
- F. Somebody has to help the bass spot a real worm from a rubber worm with a hook inside it.
- G. That's what this series is about. We've looked at humanism, determinism, relativism, popularity, evolution, and a few other illusions. Today's illusion is pretty simple, and really appealing, and really messed up.
- H. I want to read a Bible verse first, and then say what the illusion is. It's a weird verse.
  - 1. *For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (Romans 8:22)*
- I. This is something about the whole creation. That means the whole cosmos and everything in it. From the most distant galaxies of the universe, to the tiniest sub-atomic particle on the bottom of the sea. Everything big. Everything small. Every rock, tree, plant, and field. Every animal and every human.
- J. The whole creation groans and labors with birth pains. There is agony and struggle and suffering... but it's birth pains, so there is also hope of something beautiful yet to come after all the pain.
- K. I invite you to consider with me today the illusion called *Utopianism*. So three questions:
  - 1. What is Utopia?
  - 2. What are some features of Utopianism?
  - 3. What is a Christian response to Utopianism?

## II. Three Questions about Utopianism

- A. *What is Utopianism?*
  - 1. *Utopianism is the confidence that humans, working together, can usher in a period of perfect peace and prosperity and can make the world a better place.*
  - 2. The word Utopia was coined by an author in the 1500s. In 1516, English lawyer and philosopher named Sir Thomas More wrote a book called Utopia. In it, he described a fictional island society off the coast of South America where everything was beautiful and peaceful and good.
  - 3. The opposite of Utopia is dystopia. There are a lot of movies with dystopian futures: The Hunger Games, Mad Max, the Matrix, the Divergent movies, Mazerunner... Even Wall-E. In a dystopian future, societies completely break down and turn nasty.
  - 4. Utopian societies turn awesome. Basically, Utopianism is a really optimistic view of the the future based on human progress and human ideals.
- B. *What are some features of Utopianism?*
  - 1. *PHILOSOPHY: Utopian philosophy suggest that humans can create a beautiful world without reference to God.*
    - a) Almost always, utopianism is humanistic, and therefore atheistic.
    - b) When you apply the theory of evolution to biology, you get Darwinianism, or the evolution of species. Species improve as time goes on.
    - c) When you apply the theory of evolution to society, you get utopianism. Society improves as time goes on. Medicine improves, so we get healthier. Our intelligence improves, so we get nicer to each other.
      - (1) I guess they haven't looked at anything in the news lately.
    - d) This is the goal of world governments. This is the view that is being taught to our children. This is the assumption — an unproven, philosophy — that lies at the heart of how most people view society and government.
    - e) The idea that humans can create a better society without reference to God has never worked. In fact, in any society and in any culture, when the God of the Bible is followed, society improves. When atheism is followed, tyranny improves.
    - f) That is why the founders of our nation grounded their political theory by saying humans are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights.

- g) Because God gave us our rights, no government can take them away. That was the idea.
  - h) Most utopian ideas are humanism based. There is nothing higher than a fully functional human being, they say.
  - i) Most utopian ideas are evolution-based. Just as species evolve, human societies evolve too.
2. *BELIEF SYSTEM: Utopian philosophies offer competing visions of how the ideal society actually will happen, based on their belief systems.*
- a) There are a whole lot of theories as to how this beautiful world comes about. One author has a list of utopian theories: "there are socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian, and many more utopias" (Lyman Tower Sargent).
  - b) I would add "technological utopianism" which says that technology, surrounding our lives, and even soon implanted in our brains, can bring about a perfect society.
  - c) People will be lining up for the mark of the beast. Oh, it's so convenient and safe and fast! Gotta get me one of those!
  - d) Add together a perfect life ideal PLUS the ticking clock called "I'm going to die." When you add an Ideal view of life PLUS a limited span of life, what you get is desperation.  
(1) *Idealistic view of life + Limited span of life = Desperation*
  - e) I want that life, and I'm freaking out I'm going to die before it happens.
  - f) Desperation makes people do crazy things, violent things, and evil things... all because their utopian ideal doesn't look like it's going to be met. So they're going to take it by force, or by exploitation, or by any other means. It's their right, you see.
3. *OPTIMISTIC: Utopian philosophy sees a better, brighter, more beautiful society and has a positive outlook on the future.*
- a) This is daisies and sunshine and if we work together, we can make the world a better place.
  - b) The only problem is that we all have different ideas of what makes the world a better place.
  - c) Because we all have different ideas, we have to choose whose idea of a better world prevails. For most of history, that choice has been made by force. Unfortunately.
  - d) This is our idea of a better world, and now we're going to cram it down your throat.
4. *CHRISTIAN UTOPIANISM: There is a Christian version of Utopianism that includes God. It is called Post-Millennialism.*
- a) The Bible teaches there is a coming period of wonderful peace and awesome prosperity. It is called the Millennium.  
(1) *Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:2-4)*  
(2) *And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. (Isaiah 11:6, NASB).*
  - b) Things that eat each other will stop doing that.
  - c) So that is the millennium, and it is coming one day. I believe, and most evangelical Christians believe that the only way the millennium can happen is because Jesus is coming again.
  - d) When Jesus comes, he will ride down with the armies of heaven. He will come visibly, bodily, and personally to planet earth. He will destroy the enemies of God. Jesus Christ will personally rule and reign on earth for a thousand years. And in this time, there will be Utopia. Ideal society. Perfect peace. Total prosperity. No crime. No war. No hunger. No poverty. No injustice.
  - e) That is what the Bible teaches.  
(1) Jesus comes back before the millennium, so it is called pre-millennialism. That is our position as a church, and a denomination, and is the faith of millions of Christians.  
(a) *Pre-millennialism: Jesus comes back and ushers in the millennium (ideal society on earth).*
  - f) Post-millennialism is different. It says that by the power of God, we Christians can create Utopia before Jesus returns. The power of the gospel will transform the world, and create an ideal society. We will usher in the kingdom of God. We will usher in the millennium. We will bring heaven to earth. And then, after that, post-that, then Jesus returns.  
(1) *Post-millennialism: the Church and the Gospel usher in the millennium, and then Jesus returns.*

- g) If you're a lawyer, and you want to argue a case for the Bible, the only way to win the argument is to argue for pre-millennialism. And now, I want to show you why. I also want to explain how we answer this idea that humans can usher in Utopia.

C. What can we say to our Utopian friends?

1. To answer this question, I would like to go through a paragraph of Scripture with you, verse by verse, and comment as we go.
  - a) *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:18)*
2. Notice the phrase, "this present time." There was a past time, there is this present time, and there is a future time. The central feature of this present time is the very depressing word, "sufferings." The first thing we would say to our utopian friends is this: *This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.*
3. No amount of effort will change this. No government. No politics. No church program. No evangelism program. Even if everybody on earth received Jesus as their Savior, it still wouldn't flip the switch on the machine of the giant pain machine. No, the world was not created that way. It was created with beauty and order. It was created a Paradise. Utopia. The Garden of Eden, the Garden of God. One day, God will fix it. He will turn it all around.
4. In fact, all creation stands on tiptoe waiting for that day. There is a twist in the fabric of the universe. There is a twist in the moral makeup of our being. But one day, God will straighten things out.
5. That day features the revealing of the sons and daughters of God.
6. That's our destiny. It is future. But right now, it's the pain machine. And the next verse explains what happened.
  - a) *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pains together until now. (Romans 8:20-22).*
7. When Adam and Eve sinned, the whole creation fell under a curse.
8. Romans 8:20 says, "creation was subjected to futility." Futility means "unattainment."
9. Think about that for a moment. Unattainment. Unobtainment. You can't get what you want. You can't get total fulfillment. You can't get total peace. You can't attain all your dreams. This world isn't Disney world (it's a whole lot cheaper!) and dreams don't always come true.
10. Because creation was subject to unattainment, which means utopianism can never come true.
11. Verse 21 says we are trapped in "the bondage of corruption." Bondage, means we're stuck in it. And corruption means death, decay, disease, despair, destruction.
12. And don't think we are innocent victims, because we are not. This curse of unattainment, and this bondage to corruption is the inevitable consequence of a revolution against God.
  - a) It is satanic in origin, human in expression, and arrogant by definition.
13. Look at the phrases that describe this world:
  - a) subjected to futility
  - b) the bondage of corruption
  - c) groans and labors
14. This fallen world is a morally broken world, and we can't fix it.
  - a) *B. Human Sin makes Utopia impossible.*
    - (1) There is no other way to interpret Romans 8 and the rest of the Bible.
    - (2) Does that mean we give up trying to heal the world's pain?
    - (3) No way! The history of the world will show that no single group has done more to alleviate the world's pain than Christians. We're the ones who invented orphanages and hospitals. We fought to abolish slavery in the western world. We fought against child labor. We gave training and jobs and hopes to those trapped in prostitution. We built hospitals in the world's darkest, most dangerous places. Christians have been on the front lines of literacy, healthcare, and generous help for those in poverty, for two thousand years.
    - (4) But not because we believe we can change the world.
    - (5) It is because we believe God can change lives by the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - (6) Yes, we pray and serve and work for transformation of institutions. We work to make government righteous. We get into schools and art and education and business and we bring the light of Jesus there.
    - (7) But we never forget that the world's transformation won't be complete until the Lord returns. Jesus is coming again.
15. So that the third thing we would say to our Utopian friends, is:
  - a) *C. Apart from the return of Christ, there is no hope for fixing the deep wounds of our world.*

16. It is not just a problem of how we think, or of what we believe, or of how much money we throw at it, or of distribution, or of equalization, or of a lack prayer, or of lack of love.
17. It is problem with our very essence, and until that essence is transformed, utopia is always out of reach.
  - a) *Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23).*
18. There's the transformation. We suffer, we feel the gap between what is ideal and what is real.
19. So we eagerly look forward to a future day called the "adoption" aka "the redemption of our body."
20. What does that mean?
21. That is the day when Jesus returns and yanks all the residue of sin out of us by the roots, once for all.
  - a) *When you received Jesus, God saved you from the Penalty of Sin.*
  - b) *As you grow in the Lord, God delivers you from the Power of Sin.*
  - c) *When he returns, he will deliver you from the Presence of Sin.*
22. And that is Utopia. That is when paradise is regained. That is when the lion lies with the lamb. That is when Jesus himself will fix the deep wounds of this world. And in one word, all the things we hoped for, all the things we fought for and labored for, and prayed for — with one word out of the mouth of King Jesus, all those things will be complete.
23. The kingdom of God in its ultimate form is the literal, physical rule and reign of King Jesus on earth.
24. Until then, it's pain machine all the time.
25. So how do we live in this pain machine? What is our job? What is our duty?
  - a) *D. The primary mission of the people of God on planet earth is to save souls.*
26. This is how we make the world a better place. This is how we make Redding CA a better place. Save souls. Bring people to Jesus.
  - a) Social justice is not our Great Commission.
  - b) Political involvement is not our Great Commission.
  - c) Healing bodies is not our Great Commission.
  - d) Signs and Wonders is not our Great Commission.
  - e) Bible Study is not our Great Commission.
- (1) I've been a Christian long enough to see us chase a million shiny things.
27. We might have many missions, but we have only one great commission.
28. Jesus saw the pain around him. He felt it deeply. He saw the injustice. He saw the inequality. He saw the unfairness. He saw the heartache. All of this touched him deeply.
29. And what was his solution?
  - a) *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)*
30. Christians will pray. Christians will study the Bible. Christians will run ministries for kids and for people in need and all that. Christians will gather to sing and worship.
31. That doesn't take much pushing. But the first thing that dies in a church without constant reminders from leadership is evangelism. Go get lost people saved. That's what evangelism means. Poor people, rich people, drugged out people, sane people, all people. Because even if we can't restore Paradise on earth, till Jesus returns, we can restore hope in every human heart that believes.

#### D. Real Life Redding Event Series

1. With that in mind, I would like to announce something our church will be doing for the next 14 months.
2. We will, as a church, turn our efforts toward a major evangelistic push.
3. It will start with this Christmas. It will string together event after event from this Christmas till next Christmas. We will be bringing in speakers from all over the country. We will be asking you to open your home.
4. We will be doing evangelism training from the pulpit. I will teach you how to present the gospel, and how to tie the knot.
5. We will have opportunities that make it safe for you to bring unsaved friends to church. We will daisy chain everything so one event leads to the next and to the next. Next October, we will have our own major evangelistic campaign rally, and I don't know who it will be, but we're already seeking God.
6. I don't want to fill the seats with saved people.
7. I want to fill them with lost people, shoulder to shoulder with you.
8. Over the next few weeks, I'm going to be telling you all about it.
9. Because only people who get saved will live forever, and dwell in that beautiful paradise called the millennial reign of Christ.
10. And that is the mission we're on of helping people find and follow God.